

Ezra 7-8 – Thursday, August 3rd, 2017

- Because there's a fifty-eight year time gap between chapters six and seven we need the back-story of what's happening here.
 - From chapter 7 to the end of the book in chapter 10 we turn a corner of sorts concerning a second return of Jews from captivity.
 - While Zerubbabel was the focus of the first wave of Jews, Ezra will now be the focus of the second wave of Jews who return.
-
- As we're about to see, Ezra's focus will be specifically for the purpose of teaching God's people the Word and worship of God.
 - He will do this by way of the newly rebuilt temple as he teaches God's people, God's Word, and this in an entirely new context.
 - Namely, that of God's people no longer being under the rule of Israel's kings rather, they're now under the rule of Persian kings.
-
- Ezra loved God's people and God's Word so much he wanted them to apply God's Word while under the rule of a Persian king.
 - It's been said, "knowledge is information, while wisdom is the application," and such is the case with the godly wisdom of Ezra.
 - So much so that Ezra will embark on a very difficult 4-month journey for about 900 miles to teach God's Word to God's people.

Ezra 7 -- 1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest—6 this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

- This mention of the hand of the Lord his God being upon Ezra will occur a total of six times in the remaining four chapters.
- In other words, Ezra was a man who recognized the hand of God on his life as the reason for the blessing of God in his life.
- I point this out is because it speaks to perhaps one of the most important truths in all of scripture concerning God's blessing.

7 Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

- I personally believe that verse ten should be indelibly etched on the tablets of all of our hearts, especially pastors and teachers.
- This because, like Ezra, we should all prepare our hearts to both hear and do the Word of God whether we teach or are taught.
- He wanted God's people to experience first hand the blessing that comes when one is not just a hearer but doer of God's Word.

James 1:22–25 (NKJV) — 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

11 This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel: 12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. 13 I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; 15 and whereas you are to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem; 16 and whereas all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem—17 now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. 18 And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. 19 Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay for it from the king's treasury. 21 And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, 22 up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. 23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? 24 Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God.

- Couple of thoughts here on this interesting decree the first of which has to do with the generosity on the part of King Artaxerxes.
- It's important to note that Ezra will be traveling with an enormous amount of wealth in the form of silver gold and even money.
- In verse twenty-three we're given a glimpse into the motives of this Persian King such that he wants to appease Israel's God.

- The second thought has to do with the peril Ezra and all of those returning to Jerusalem face as they travel with such treasure.
- The reason being is that there are thieves along the way in this 900-mile journey, which doubtless would steal, kill and destroy.
- The question becomes, how did they safely complete this journey without this happening, and the answer is in chapter eight.

25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment. 27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, 28 and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.

- The chapter ends with Ezra acknowledging the grace and mercy of the King, while at the same time giving God all of the glory.
- Notice in verse twenty-eight where we're told that Ezra was encouraged because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him.
- In other words, Ezra knew that all the king had done for him came by way of the hand of the Lord turning his heart in this way.

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV) — 1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Ezra 8 -- 1 These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: 2 of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; 3 of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him were one hundred and fifty males; 4 of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males; 5 of the sons of Shechaniah, Ben-Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males; 6 of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males; 7 of the sons of Elam, Jeshiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males; 8 of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him eighty males; 9 of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males; 10 of the sons of Shelomith, Ben-Josiphiah, and with him one hundred and sixty males; 11 of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males; 12 of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred and ten males; 13 of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these—Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah—and with them sixty males; 14 also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them seventy males. 15 Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there. 16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren the Nethinim at the place Casiphia—that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. 18 Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men; 19 and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; 20 also of the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim. All of them were designated by name.

- The chapter begins by telling us there were only about 1,500 men returning with Ezra to Jerusalem, which is less than before.
- Actually, significantly less than the over 50,000 that returned in the first wave of Israelites with Zerubbabel some 70-years prior.
- It seems that the Jews who didn't accept this invitation and take this step of faith and go back had become way too comfortable.
- If this weren't bad enough, we're told in verse fifteen that when Ezra looked among those with him he found none of the Levites.
- While we're not told the reason why the Levites didn't return, we can surmise that they too had become way too comfortable.
- This is one of the biggest problems leaders face in the church today; they may have resources but they don't have the men.

Matthew 9:35–38 (NKJV) — 35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

- Here we have the answer to the aforementioned question of how Ezra and those with him, safely returned back to Jerusalem.
- The answer is that of humbling themselves in prayer and fasting and trusting God for safe passage instead of trusting the king.
- It's interesting to note while Nehemiah had a military escort from the king, Ezra had told the king that God's hand was on him.

I would like to recommend an outstanding book on the subject of prayer and fasting by Derek Prince who's now home with the Lord. It's titled, "Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting." In it he refers to this passage in Ezra, and I would like to share with you some of what he writes, "Ezra did something that you and I sometimes do. By testifying to the king, he put himself in a position where he had to live up to his own testimony. He had told the king: 'we are the servants of the living God. Our God protects us and supplies all our needs.' ...They had to make a long journey through country infested by savage tribes and by bandits. In addition to their wives and children, they had with them the sacred vessels of the temple, ... what a prey for bandits! The question arose: How were they to be protected on their way from Babylon to Jerusalem? Should Ezra go to the king and ask him for an escort of soldiers and horsemen? No doubt the king would have granted this request, but Ezra felt ashamed to make it because he had already testified to the king that their God, the true and living God, would protect those who served Him. At this point, Ezra and the returning exiles made a vital decision: They would not rely on soldiers and horsemen for their protection, but on the supernatural power of God. There would not have been anything morally wrong in accepting an escort from the king, but it would have been depending on carnal means. Instead, by collective prayer and fasting, they committed themselves to seeking their help and protection solely from the spiritual realm of God's power." He goes on to write about how the pilgrims used this very passage in Ezra to declare a public fast prior to their safe passage to America. Prince writes, "One distinctive practice employed by the pilgrims to achieve their spiritual goals was that of united public prayer and fasting. ...Being ready to depart, they had a day of solemn humiliation, their pastor [John Robinson] taking his text from Ezra 8: 21. ... : " [The] use of the word humiliation indicates that the pilgrims understood the scriptural connection ...between fasting and self-humbling. Robinson's choice of the text from Ezra is singularly appropriate. Both in motivation and in experience, there is a close parallel between the pilgrims' embarking on their journey to the New World and Ezra's company of exiles returning from Babylon to Jerusalem to help in the restoration of the temple."

Psalm 35:13 - Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered,

Adam Clarke - "Thus we see that this good man had more anxiety for the glory of God than for his own personal safety."

G. Campbell Morgan - "God never fails those who act in full dependence on Himself, and so in complete independence of all others."

24 And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them—25 and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered. 26 I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, 27 twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. 28 And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. 29 Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD." 30 So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

- Here we have an important Biblical principle woven into the fabric of the narrative, and it has to do with financial accountability.
- I don't know if it's possible to overstate the importance of this, especially when it comes to the ministry within the local church.
- Please know that as a church we have numerous checks and balances to insure financial integrity at Calvary Chapel Kaneohe.

31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. 32 So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days. 33 Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, 34 with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time. 35 The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. 36 And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God.

- The chapter ends with the accounting of all the silver and gold, as well as the accounting of all the burnt offerings made to God.
- Lest one think that this is just nebulous information, let me hasten to say that this was recorded for us for a very good reason.
- The reason is this marked a profound change in the hearts and on the part of God's people concerning returning to the Lord.